

Bishops and Territory

The Case of Late Roman and Byzantine North Africa

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The North African landscape, from the late third to the beginning of the fourth century, is characterized by an increased number of urban and rural bishoprics.¹ This large number of bishoprics remains a feature of the North African scene until at least the end of the Byzantine period. In the past, research into the phenomenon has focused on the contrast between Catholics and Donatists during this period;² studies

looking diachronically at the development of bishoprics, however, are lacking. This paper aims, using written and archaeological sources, to provide different perspectives on the relationships between clergy and territory and to discuss the rise, development, and organization of the bishoprics, urban and rural, and how they changed from the second half of the third century to the beginning of the seventh. This chronological range has been chosen on the basis of the availability of information, which is inadequate for earlier periods.³ Having discussed the principal documents available on the number and character of North African bishoprics, I will reconstruct the distribution and extension of bishoprics in one specific area of Africa Proconsularis, using both texts and archaeological evidence. A diachronic analysis of the setting and development of this Christian landscape aims to shed new light on its transformation over time and to discuss critically the idea that the bishoprics continued unchanged until the Islamic conquest of Africa.

The large number of rural bishoprics in the fourth and early fifth centuries may indicate that bishops were also involved in secular life within communities.⁴ For

1 Generally in the rest of the Roman world, the ecclesiastical hierarchy was characterized by one bishop for each city. This is the case for instance in Asia Minor: see D. Feissel, "L'Évêque, titres et fonctions d'après les inscriptions grecques jusqu'à VII^e siècle," in *Actes du XI^e Congrès International d'archéologie chrétienne: Lyon, Vienne, Grenoble, Genève et Aoste (21–28 Septembre 1986)* (Rome, 1989), 800–828, esp. 812. On the peculiarity of rural bishoprics in North Africa and their characteristics in the Byzantine period, see R. A. Markus, "Country Bishops in Byzantine Africa," in *The Church in Town and Country*, ed. D. Baker, 1–15; repr. in R. A. Markus, *From Augustine to Gregory the Great: History and Christianity in Late Antiquity* (London, 1983). Very little is known on the early Islamic period, especially in terms of archaeological evidence for churches and Catholic religious buildings. Most churches excavated between the end of the 19th c. and the beginning of the 20th c. were not done so stratigraphically, and chronologies have often been based on unfounded assumptions. Recent re-excavation suggests that some churches continued to be in use immediately after the Islamic conquest, as happens for instance in the Near East; for an example see S. Stevens, A. V. Kalinowski, and H. van der Leest, eds., *Bir Ftouha: A Pilgrimage Church Complex at Carthage*, Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series 59 (Portsmouth, 2005), 489–95; the complex was probably in use in the 8th c. although the function is uncertain.

2 The nature of the Donatist dispute will be not discussed here, as it is outside the aims of the paper.

3 For some attempt at analysis of an earlier period, see C. Buenacasa Pérez, "La creación del patrimonio eclesiástico de las iglesias norteafricanas en época romana (siglos II–V)," in *Sacralidad y arqueología* (= *Antigüedad y cristianismo* 21), ed. J. M. Blázquez Martínez and A. González Blanco (Murcia, 2004), 493–509.

4 This aspect will be investigated at a different level in different periods, according to the available data. See A. Leone, "Clero,

example, the high number of rural bishops has sometimes been considered a result of the pre-Roman and Roman organization of the North African population.⁵ This paper examines North Africa from a Roman geographical perspective, that is, the provinces of Mauretania Caesariensis, Mauretania Sitifensis, Numidia, Africa Proconsularis, Byzacena, and Tripolitana. These Roman provinces differed substantially from one another in their organization (some areas were highly urbanized, while others had only a few urban settlements);⁶ therefore, the Christian presence and its impact on each territory may also have differed. However, sources are often not detailed enough to allow consideration of single regions or to provide the same level of information for different areas. The evidence is not at all homogeneous, although the identification of some common elements is possible.

The first points to address are how and when the number of bishops, particularly rural ones, started to increase in these regions. It is currently impossible to determine precisely the total number of bishops and its variation over time, but information for some specific periods from the third to fifth centuries exists.⁷ These are: the mid-third century, with the councils under Cyprian; 411 CE, with the acts of the conference at Carthage of Catholics and Donatists; and 484 CE, through the list of Catholic bishops who attended

the conference at Carthage called by the Vandal king Huneric; some later sources are also recorded by J. Mesnage.⁸ Moreover, very recently, a complete list of all the African bishops from the third to the ninth century, using a variety of primary and secondary sources, was compiled by Giorgio Fedalto;⁹ this catalogue will be considered throughout the discussion.

The Development of Urban and Rural Bishoprics in North Africa: The First Phase (Third to Fifth Century)

The Third Century

The data from the councils from 248 to 258 have enabled a distribution chart of bishops in North Africa to be compiled.¹⁰ These data, which emerge from the analysis of Cyprian's work and of the *Sententiae Episcoporum numero LXXXVII de hereticis baptizandis* (256),¹¹ have allowed Yvette Duval to conclude that in the mid-third century there was already a large number of bishoprics in North Africa, grouped on the east-west axis (from Madauros to Cuicul and from Theveste to Lamasba),¹² while they were almost entirely absent in Mauretania.¹³ Bishoprics appear to have been extremely numerous

proprietà, cristianizzazione delle campagne nel nord Africa tardoantico: Status quaestionis," *AnTard* 14 (2006): 95–104, and D. Riggs, "Christianising the Rural Communities of Late Roman Africa: A Process of Coercion or Persuasion?" in *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices*, ed. H. Drake (Aldershot, 2006), 297–308.

5 The large presence of rural bishops especially in Numidia has been interpreted as due to the strong cult of Saturn and, as suggested by Marcel Leglay, the replacement of the priests of Saturn with (Donatist) bishops; see M. Leglay, *Saturne Africain: Histoire* (Paris, 1966), 490. This assumption is based on the suggestion by W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1985), 101–4 of an existing connection between the cult of Saturn—Baal Hammon in its Roman personification—and the Donatist religious practices.

6 The same point is stressed by W. Eck, "Der Episkopat im spätantiken Africa: Organisatorische Entwicklung, soziale Herkunft und öffentliche Funktionen," *Historische Zeitschrift* 236, no. 2 (1983): 267–95, esp. 265.

7 A general and complete catalog of the number of bishoprics and bishops based on the written sources from 303 to 533 can be found in S.-T. Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église d'Afrique," in *Prosopographie Chrétienne du Bas-Empire*, vol. 1, *Prosopographie de l'Afrique chrétienne (A.D. 303–533)*, ed. A. Mandouze (Paris, 1982), 1243–1317.

8 J. Mesnage, *L'Afrique Chrétienne: Évêchés et ruines antiques, d'après les manuscrits de Mgr Toulotte et les découvertes archéologiques les plus récentes* (Paris, 1912).

9 G. Fedalto, "Liste vescovi dell'Africa cristiana: Secoli III–IX," *Studia Patavina* 55 (2008): 393–571.

10 The total number of bishops has been calculated at around 133: H. von Soden, "Die Prosopographie des afrikanischen Episkopats zur Zeit Cyprianus," *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 12 (1909): 247–70. Such an interpretation has been discussed in Y. Duval, *Les Chrétientés d'occident et leur évêque au III^e siècle: Plebs in Ecclesia Constituta* (Cyprien, Ep. 63) (Paris, 2005), 22.

11 *Sententiae Episcoporum Numero LXXXVII de Haereticis Baptizandis, Sancti Cypriani Episcopi Opera, pars III.4, ad fidem codicum summa cura selectorum nec non adhibitis editionibus prioribus praecipuis*, ed. G. F. Diercks, CSEL IIIIE (Turnhout, 2004), and Y. Duval, *Les Chrétientés d'occident*, 27.

12 Y. Duval, *Les Chrétientés d'occident*, 27.

13 *Ibid.*, 23–24 revised the study and the map of the distribution of bishops by F. van der Meer and C. Mohrmann, *Atlas of the Early Christian World* (Toronto, 1958), map 22. In reconsidering their studies Y. Duval agreed on the low number of bishops in Mauretania, but disagreed with the identification of bishops at Thucca and Novarica (both in Mauretania, further reducing the attested number of bishops in this region in the 3rd c.).

along the coast of Numidia and especially in northeast Africa Proconsularis (in the area surrounding Carthage and in the Mejerda valley, which was highly urbanized in the Roman period).¹⁴

In the mid-third century, bishoprics appear to have been strictly connected to urban areas—*municipia* and *coloniae*.¹⁵ The evidence for this is confirmed by Serge Lancel in his detailed analysis of the period in Proconsularis (a region with a high percentage of urban settlements).¹⁶ The general third-century panorama, then, is a network of urban bishoprics. The way in which these cities were selected, however, is not clear: the connection between the civic status of an urban settlement and the presence of a bishopric is rarely obvious.¹⁷ The reason for the establishment of a bishopric, at least in this phase, may be connected to the wealthier status of one urban center over another or, more probably, the presence of a stronger Christian community. At Bulla Regia in the region Bulla Regia-Simitthu, which acquired the title of *municipium* in the Flavian period and became a *colonia* under Hadrian, there was a bishop from the mid-third century; by contrast, Simitthu and Thuburnica became *coloniae* in the Augustan period, but neither had a seat.¹⁸

14 Africa Proconsularis has, in fact, the highest percentage of urban centers, especially in the northeast, in the Mejerda valley. Noël Duval counted 160 towns in an area of 21,000 square kilometres: N. Duval, "L'Évêque et la cathédrale en Afrique du Nord," in *Actes du XI^e congrès international d'archéologie chrétienne*, CEFR 123 (Rome, 1989), 345–403, esp. 345.

15 In the list of bishops of the *Sententiae Episcoporum* dated to A.D. 256 words like *salus* and *villa* still appear to be completely absent: Y. Duval, *Les Chrétientés d'occident*, 30.

16 S. Lancel, "Évêchés et cités dans les provinces Africaines (III^e–V^e siècles)," in *L'Afrique dans l'Occident romain (I^{er} siècle av. J.-C. – IV^e siècle ap. J.-C.): Actes du Colloque organisé par l'École Française de Rome sous le patronage de l'Institut National d'archéologie et d'art de Tunis, Rome, 3–5 décembre 1987* (Rome, 1990), 273–90, esp. 277–78. In the central Mejerda valley, which is the most intensively urbanized area, at least nine cities have been recorded, in an area of about 1,200 km²: Y. Thébert, "L'évolution urbaine dans les Provinces orientales de l'Afrique Romaine Tardive," *Opus* 2 (1983): 99–130, esp. 100.

17 Lancel, "Évêchés et cités," considers different areas in North Africa, concluding that there is no specific correspondence among settlements with different status, and also that among urban settlements holding the same status, the fact that one town acquired its status before another one does not appear to have been taken into account.

18 *Ibid.*, 279–80. Bulla Regia is also one of the last attested sees in North Africa, still recorded at the beginning of the eighth century (see table page 10).

The Fourth and Fifth Centuries

The number of bishops appears to have substantially increased after the third century. In this period, our understanding of the creation and rise of a complex network of bishoprics is greatly improved by the Acts of the conference of Catholics and Donatists in 411, published by Serge Lancel.¹⁹ This document is the first detailed source that allows identification of "rural bishoprics," on the basis of the toponym. These were seats connected to a villa or a small community without formal civic status. Identification of such sites is hampered by both the limited written sources and the nature of archaeological data, which tend to focus on religious monuments—their architecture and liturgy—but to leave the surrounding landscape uninvestigated, so it is often impossible to state whether a rural church was connected with a villa or a more complex settlement.²⁰

So far, toponyms are the best source for the identification of rural bishoprics,²¹ and the Acts of the

19 Particularly relevant here are S. Lancel, ed., *Actes de la conférence de Carthage en 411*, vol. 1, *Introduction générale*, SC 194 (Paris, 1972), and vol. 4, *Additamentum criticum: Notices sur les sièges et les toponymes, notes complémentaires et index*, SC 373 (Paris, 1991).

20 In his introduction to the conference, P. Pergola, "Alle origini della Parrocchia rurale," in *idem*, ed., *Alle origini della Parrocchia rurale (IV–VIII sec.): Atti della Giornata tematica dei Seminari di Archeologia Christiana–19 Marzo 1998* (Vatican City, 1999), 8–9, lists a series of important elements in identifying rural religious centers, namely: geographical location and nature of the settlement before the building of the church (in North Africa it is often very difficult to find this information); toponym; type of religious building (baptistery, church) and possible connection with the dioceses; and funerary function.

21 An attempt to identify several sites has been made in Leone, "Clero, proprietà, cristianizzazione" (n. 4 above), 102–4. These are for instance: the *Saltus Burunitanus* (Souk el Khemis) in the Mejerda valley; *Villa Magna Mariana siue Mappalia Siga* (Henchr Mettich). Some other sites can be hypothetically identified as seats of a diocese: Henchr Gousset is characterized by a basilica, two olive presses, and an "édifice à auges"; for a general overview and complete bibliography on this latter type of building see A. Leone, *Changing Townscapes in North Africa from Late Antiquity to the Arab Conquest* (Bari, 2007), 148–154. Near this site is Hanechi el Khima (1 km west of Henchr Gousset) with two small churches, one of which has a baptistery, and nearby another church at Henchr el Khmira. Some sites were probably independent of urban areas, as was Henchr Sokrine, a small agglomeration near Leptiminus, and a three-naved church and baptistery at Ksar Hellal, near the Byzantine fort there. In Zeugitana/Africa Proconsularis, possible settlements of rural bishoprics are: Bou Achir (1.5 km from Segermes) and Saadat Mornissa. In Byzacena: Hadjeb el Aioun (between Hadrumetum and Theveste); Sidi Abich (near Uppenna); Henchr er Baroud (20

Conference at Carthage in 411 provides a useful list,²² as follows:

- Names ending in *iana/ianum*. As in the case of Iucundiana, these settlements took their names from the large estates or *fundi* in which they were located;²³
- Settlements defined as *turris*. The toponym is connected with the presence of a defensive structure to protect a specific estate, as for instance Turris Rutunda, modern Sidi Khalifa near Mustis;²⁴
- *Horrea*. This term was used to define private (at least originally) agricultural activity in an area, as for instance Horrea Coelia in Byzacena;²⁵
- *Casae*. It has been suggested that this toponym refers to settlements identifiable with various sites inhabited by workmen and located inside large estates that, at some point, also acquired a bishopric. This is the case for Casae Beguenses, which refers to the Saltus Beguenses, known from an inscription dated to 138;²⁶
- *Locus* (for example locus Nasaitensis and locus Tibuzabetensis). This term must refer to settlements where, in contrast to the *civitates*, municipal administration was in the hands not of magistrates but of the *seniores locorum*;²⁷

km south of Sufetula); El Moussat (south of Sfax); Kasar el Ahmar (in the eastern high steppe); Henchir Sidi Ali (near Nara); Sidi Mansour (10 km north of Sfax); Henchir Dhrâa Essayem (near Sidi Mansour). For an attempt at identifying bishoprics in Byzacena, see also P. G. Spanu and R. Zucca, "Le diocesi rurali della Proconsularis e della Byzacena: Aspetti storici e archeologici," *Africa Romana* 12 (1998): 268–93.

22 Lancel, *Actes de la Conférence de Carthage*, 1:134–43.

23 Ibid., 1:136.

24 Ibid., 1:137.

25 Ibid., 1:138.

26 *Senatus Consultum de nundinis Saltus Beguensis in t(erritorio) Casensi . . . in provincia Africa, regione Beguensi, territorio Musulamiorum, ad Casas. . .* (CIL VIII, 11451); see also Lancel, *Actes de la Conférence de Carthage*, 1:138 nn. 2–3.

27 Lancel *Actes de la Conférence de Carthage*, 1:139.

• Finally, the *castella* (mentioned in the case of Hippo considered below) can be difficult to interpret. In North Africa there is reference to two *castella* that were certainly military settlements (Castellum Dimmidi and Tamuda) and about sixty that were civilian settlements.²⁸ Known *castella* are located in the area that includes the northern part of Mauretania Caesariensis and Sitifensis, Numidia, and the western part of Proconsularis.²⁹ It has been generally agreed that *castellum* refers to a settlement located in the territory of a town³⁰ that never attained municipal status.³¹

At the Council in Carthage in 411 there were 286 Catholic bishops mentioned and 285 Donatist ones.³² Considering those that were absent and the seats that were vacant, Noël Duval counted around 400 bishops each for the Catholic and Donatist parties.³³ In this phase, in contrast with earlier periods, a great number of rural bishops is recorded, and these were principally

28 For a complete collection of *Castella* in Africa and a synthesis of previous bibliography see R. Rebuffat, "Castellum," in *Encyclopédie Berbère* (Aix-en-Provence, 1993), 12:1822–33.

29 Ibid., 1823.

30 Ibid., 1824.

31 A similar idea is in Lancel, *Actes de la Conférence de Carthage*, 1:140–41. The *castella* probably survived until the 6th c. and later, although there is no specific evidence: Rebuffat, "Castellum," 1825.

32 Lancel, *Actes de la Conférence de Carthage*, 1:144: Proconsularis had 87+15 Catholic bishops and 56+4 Donatist bishops (the first number represents bishops who certainly belonged to the province, and the second bishops who probably belonged to it); Numidia 55+9 Catholic bishops and 67+4 Donatist bishops; Byzacena 49+12 Catholic bishops and 47+6 Donatist Bishops; Mauretania Sitifensis 12+4 Catholic bishops and 18+3 Donatist bishops; Mauretania Cesariensis 14+3 Catholic bishops and 21+3 Donatist bishops; Tripolitana 5 Catholic bishops and 5 Donatist bishops.

33 N. Duval, "L'Évêque et la cathédrale en Afrique du Nord" (n. 14 above), esp. 346. Duval points out that Mauretania is probably incorrectly represented, as later, in 484, the number of bishops from Mauretania is higher. On the significance of rural Donatist bishops and the analysis of some archaeological evidence see: W. H. C. Frend, "Donatist and Catholic: The Organisation of Christian Communities in the North African Countryside," in *Cristianizzazione ed organizzazione ecclesiastica delle campagne nell'alto medioevo: Espansione e resistenze, 10–16 aprile 1980* (Spoleto, 1982), 2:601–37. For some more discussion see P. R. L. Brown, "Religious Dissent in the Later Roman Empire: The Case of North Africa," *History* 46 (1961): 83–101.

Donatists.³⁴ In North Africa we can clearly discern the progressive development of a more complex network of bishoprics. For instance, some North African *massae* (large estates composed of a series of *fundi*)³⁵ were donated by Constantine I to the baptistery of St. John Lateran,³⁶ and these probably at length became the seat of a rural bishop.³⁷ Data on later private estates attest to the presence of bishoprics connected with rural settlements, as is the case for instance with St. Melania the Younger.³⁸ She donated to the church her estate, which was larger than the *municipium* of Thagaste and included a villa with numerous artisans and both a Donatist and a Catholic bishop.³⁹ The case of Antoninus of Fussala, which will be considered in more detail below, provides another example

of a private estate belonging to a *domina* that was also a bishopric. The significant presence of bishops in the territory can further be traced through the constant criticisms voiced to members of the clergy, including bishops, at African councils, concerning their activities as managers of rural estates,⁴⁰ suggesting that this practice was very common and that it involved members of the higher ranks of the religious community.

Similar evidence can be demonstrated by the case of Antoninus of Fussala, reported by Augustine, which allows us to follow the formation process of a new diocese that resulted in the splitting of the ancient administrative and ecclesiastical territory of the city of Hippo.

The Case of Antoninus of Fussala

The *castellum* of Fussala, located in the territory of Hippo Regius, was the site of a dispute concerning the misconduct of its bishop, Antoninus. The entire episode (although we lack information about its conclusion) is reported in *Letter 20** of Augustine,⁴¹ and another account, though less detailed, is in *Letter 209*.⁴²

*Letter 20** informs us about the childhood of Antoninus, the circumstances of his nomination as bishop of Fussala, his actions, the complaints of the people, and the first meeting of the episcopal tribunal of Hippo, followed by a provincial council of Numidian bishops and the involvement of Pope Boniface. Later

34 P. Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire de l'Afrique Chrétienne depuis les origines jusqu'à l'invasion Arabe*, vol. 4, *Le Donatisme* (Paris, 1912), 136, points out that Catholics, aiming to make their propaganda more effective, fragmented their dioceses, and where there was a Donatist bishop, they created two or three Catholic dioceses. For a recent discussion on the nature of Donatism as being effectively the principal church in North Africa in the 5th c., see B. D. Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine* (Cambridge, 2011), 561–64 and 630–50.

35 See on this D. Vera, "Enfiteusi, colonato e trasformazioni agrarie nell'Africa Proconsolare del tardo Impero," *Africa Romana* 4 (1987): 268–93; D. Vera, "Conductores domus nostrae, conductores privatorum: Concentrazione fondiaria e redistribuzione della ricchezza nell'Africa Tardoantica," in *Institutions, société et vie politique dans l'empire romain au IV^e siècle ap. J.-C.*, ed. M. Christol, S. Demouguin, Y. Duval, C. Lepelley, and L. Pietri, CEF 159 (Rome, 1992), 465–90 and D. Vera, "Massa Fundorum: Forme della grande proprietà e poteri della città in Italia fra Costantino e Gregorio Magno," *MEFR* 111, no. 2 (1999): 991–1025.

36 These were: Massa Iuncis, Massa Capsis, Massa Varia Sardana, Massa Camaras, Massa Numas, Massa Sulphorata, Massa Walzari. For a detailed discussion, see Leone, "Clero, proprietà e cristianizzazione," 97–98.

37 *Massae fundorum* comprised a series of *fundi*, and in Sicily and Africa especially they were not very fragmented and were usually located in the same municipal territory (Vera, "Massa Fundorum," 1004). In the same article, Vera (1020) suggests that they probably became seats of rural bishoprics.

38 The case of Melania has been studied in detail by A. Giardina, "Carità eversiva: Le donazioni di Melania la giovane e gli equilibri della società tardo-romana," *Studi Storici* 1 (1988): 127–42.

39 Gerontius, *Vita Melaniae Iunioris*, 18.21 (L); see A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire (284–602)* (Oxford 1964), 2:787 and n. 40: *dedit autem et possessionem multum prestantem redditum, quae possessio maior etiam erat civitatis ipsius, habens balneum, artifices multos, aurifices, argentarios et aerarios; et duos episcopos, unum nostrae fidei et alium haereticorum.*

40 For a collection of all the concilia, see Leone, "Clero, proprietà, cristianizzazione delle campagne," 99 n. 44, and especially (mentioning specifically bishops), C. Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae: A.345–A.525*, CCSL 149 (Turnhout, 1974), 38, no. 100: *Ut episcopi, presbyteri et diaconi non sint conductores aut procuratores privatorum neque ullo tali negotio uictum quaerant, quo eos uel peregrinari uel ab ecclesiasticis officiis auocari necesse sit.* The same is found in *Canones Causa Apiarii*, 105, no. 16.148–49, where the text prohibits bishops, presbyters, and deacons from managing estates and their productions; *ut episcopi, presbyteri uel diaconi non sint conductores aut procuratores*; in *Concilia Africae*, "Ferrandi Ecclesiae Carthaginiensis diaconi breviario Canonum" (526–546), 293. 70.

41 It is contained in a manuscript that was first analyzed and published by Johannes Divjak: *Les Lettres de Saint Augustin découvertes par Johannes Divjak, Communications présentées au colloque des 20–21 Septembre 1982* (Paris, 1983); C. Lepelley, "La Crise de l'Afrique romaine au début du V^e siècle, d'après les lettres nouvellement découvertes de Saint Augustin," *Comptes Rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* (1981): 445–63; and Saint Augustine, *Lettres 1*–29**, ed. J. Divjak, Bibliothèque Augustinienne, Œuvres de Saint Augustin 46B (Paris, 1987).

42 A. Goldbacher, ed., *S. Aureli Augustini Hipponiensis Episcopi Epistulae*, CSEL 57 (Leipzig, 1911), 347–53.

the tribunal met in Tegulata, and the inhabitants of Fussala were interviewed twice. The end of the letter refers to the archival material regarding the inquiry that was sent to Rome.⁴³

Antoninus, who had been educated in a monastery, was selected by Augustine to become the bishop of a new rural seat, in part because he could speak Punic (*Letter* 20*.3.62). The creation of the new bishopric was undertaken by Augustine at the end of the Donatist dispute, in an attempt to reorganize his diocese and to counter the presence of the former Donatists.⁴⁴ The territory had been under Donatist influence, and the sense of local identity was very strong; for this reason the presence of a Catholic Punic-speaking bishop was seen as important by Augustine. When Antoninus became bishop, he had only reached the level of lector (the lowest level in the ecclesiastical hierarchy).⁴⁵

Antoninus was accused of misconduct. After the trial, he was not deprived of his status as bishop, but he did not maintain the bishopric at Fussala. He was invited to take a seat in one of the territories that were previously within the bishopric of Fussala, but Fussala itself was excluded. These actions further fragmented the territory. The new bishop of Fussala agreed, although with some resistance, to give eight *plebes* to Antoninus.⁴⁶ The latter also obtained a promise from the Primate of Numidia that he would have the Fundus Thogonoetensis as the new seat of his diocese (*Letter* 20*.9). Five more *fundi* were guaranteed by Augustine himself with the promise that Antoninus

would not retaliate against the Fussalenses for their actions. Evidence suggests that the territories given to Antoninus by the new bishop of Fussala were economically and hierarchically less important. This is confirmed by letter 209.5, where Augustine says: "*Honorem itaque integrum servavimus iuveni corrigendo; sed corripiendo minuiimus potestatem. . .*" The existence of a sort of internal hierarchy between urban and rural bishoprics is attested by the acts of the 411 conference.⁴⁷ Lancel suggests that the territory of Fussala must have been contained within the diocese of Hippo, at its southern edge (fig. 1).⁴⁸ Hippo appears to have been the only urban settlement in the area. The territory surrounding the city had some *castella*, as at Fussala and Siniti, but it was characterized principally by *fundi* and *villae*. The case of Antoninus and the descriptions provided by Augustine indicate that Fussala was not a particularly monumental city,⁴⁹ but that it was governed by a certain level of structured administration.⁵⁰

43 For a detailed analysis of the events and the chronology see S. Lancel, "L'Affaire d'Antoninus de Fussala: Pays choses et gens de Numidie d'Hippone saisis dans la durée d'une procédure d'enquête épiscopale (Ep. 20*)," in *Les Lettres de Saint Augustin*, 267–85. A summary of the events is also provided in J. E. Merdinger, *Rome and the African Church in the Time of Augustine* (New Haven, 1997), 154–82.

44 For some comments on this see P.-A. Février, "Discours d'Église et réalité dans les nouvelles Lettres d'Augustin," in *Les Lettres de Saint Augustin*, 101–15.

45 *Letter* 20*.2.32. For comments on the impact on Augustine's image and the consequence of his choice to promote someone at a low level of the hierarchy, see W. H. C. Frend, "Fussala: Augustine's Crisis of Credibility," in *Les Lettres de Saint Augustin*, 252–65.

46 Saint Augustine, *Letter* 20*.9.189. Considering the discussion here on the definition of the territory of a bishopric, the reference to *plebes* may be made in a Christian perspective; see on this Y. Duval, *Les Chrétientés d'occident* (n. 13 above), 141–61. There is no specific indication of the type of settlements occupied by the eight *plebes*, which makes it difficult to analyze the secular meaning of this term.

47 Lancel, *Actes de la Conférence de Carthage*, 1:143. Catholics had denounced the abuse by the Donatists, mainly from rural dioceses, pointing out that the bishop from a *fundus* or a *castellum* did not have the same rank as an urban bishop.

48 In the mid-3rd c. the only seat attested in the region is that of Hippo Regius. The limits of the territory are partially known; three points have in fact been identified and they suggest the presence of a wide territory. Later new seats are: Calama (first bishop mentioned during the persecution by Diocletian) and Thagaste, where a bishop is known around 300. The two territories are located to the southwest and southeast of Hippo. For a detailed analysis of the progressive development of the region see Lancel, "Évêchés et cités" (n. 16 above), 285–86. See also S. Lancel, "Études sur la Numidie d'Hippone au temps de saint Augustin," *MEFRA* 96 (1984): 1086–1113, and J. Desange and S. Lancel, "L'apport des nouvelles lettres à la géographie historique de l'Afrique Antique et l'Église d'Afrique," in *Les Lettres de Saint Augustin*, 87–99.

49 Saint Augustine, *Letter* 20*.6.123–126 refers to houses/buildings confiscated and destroyed in order to provide building material for new constructions. This evidence suggests that the practice, widely attested later on in major urban centers, began as early as the 4th century; on the progressive decaying of urban centers from the 4th c. in Africa, see Leone, *Changing Townscapes* (n. 21 above), 82–96 and 135–44.

50 Augustine, *Letter* 20*.16.1 *Itaque sub conspectu sex episcoporum frequenti alacritate concurrens plebs illa [Fussalensis] interrogata est*. Augustine, *Letter* 20*.20.1 . . . *etiam tertio illos eo absente consuli placuit segregatim colonos uniuscuiusque cum actoribus uel procuratoribus sine conductoribus suis*. The inhabitants of the *castellum*, the *Fussalenses*, were considered to be a single *plebs* and they were interviewed by the primate, in the presence of their *actores* and *procuratores*.

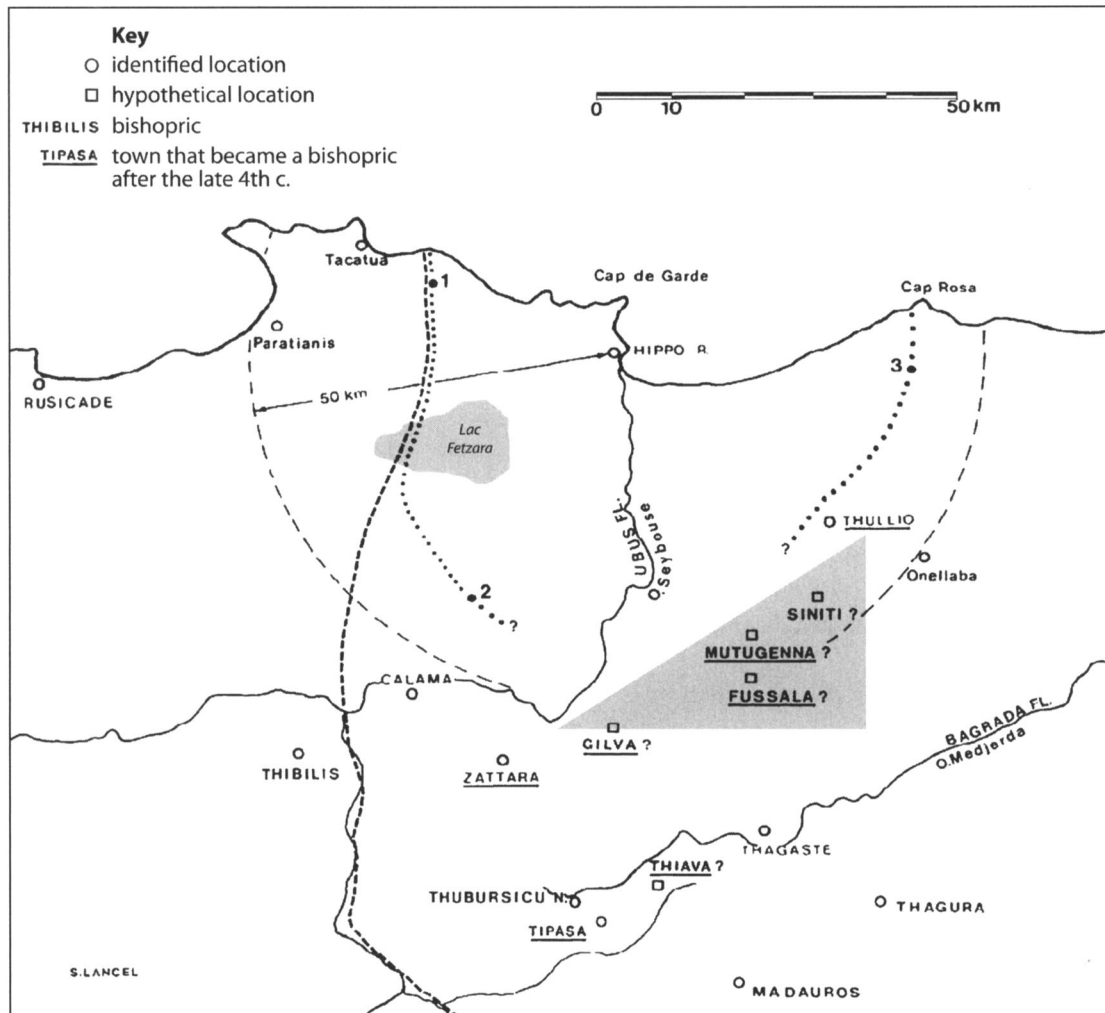


FIG. 1 Map of ecclesiastical territory of Hippo from S. Lancel, "Études sur la Numidie d'Hippone au temps de saint Augustin," *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome: Antiquité* 96.2 (1984): 1085–1113, fig. 3.

The Fundus Thogonoetensis, by contrast, the new seat of the diocese of Antoninus, was probably part of the *casae* grouped around the residency of a *domina* (whose name is unknown). The population of the Fundus Thogonoetensis refer to their *domina* in the sources, and in one case they threaten to leave the *fundus* if she allows Antoninus to acquire a seat there (*Letter* 20*.16–17), because they know about his misconduct.⁵¹

This episode shows the progressive subdivision of a diocese and the potential for conflict due to a bishop's

behavior. The new diocese does not seem to have been created for church-organizational reasons, but instead for political ones, with Bishop Augustine having full power to subdivide his diocese. This confirms the greater authority of urban over rural seats. It also indicates that the creation of new rural dioceses at this time was the responsibility of the local bishops, who were trying to counter the Donatist presence. The network of rural seats that developed may not therefore have been centrally planned; rather, we see strong regional diversity, with urban bishops controlling the network of bishoprics in their territories. In fifth-century North Africa a significant degree of independence seems to have been given to bishops holding the most important sees in the region.

51 In the settlement, the social group composed of the *coloni* supervised by a *dominus/a* or a *conductor* probably did not constitute a political body able to represent themselves publicly, as happened in the case of the *castellum* of Fussala.

The Vandal Period

The situation in the Vandal period (430s to 530s) remains unclear owing to a lack of information. The sources are limited, and the differing attitudes of the Arian Vandal kings toward Catholics, which vacillated between persecution and tolerance, cloud the issue. The most relevant document for this period is the list of Catholic bishops in the *Notitia Provinciarum et Civitatum Africae* of 484.⁵² The catalog is associated, as pointed out in the *incipit* of the document, with the conference of Arians and Catholics called by King Huneric (the second Vandal king) on 1 February 484. It is the only document of its nature available for the Vandal period.⁵³ Huneric was one of the most virulent persecutors of Catholics and was responsible for the harshest measures taken against them by any Vandal ruler, which took place in 484, immediately after the conference.

The whole document was recently reconsidered by Yves Modéran. The list of Catholic bishops is organized by province, and it mentions:⁵⁴

- In Proconsularis, 54 bishoprics and names of bishops (with the exact total number at the end, LIIII);
- In Numidia, 123 bishoprics and bishops (with an incorrect total number at the end, CXXV);
- In Byzacena, two names of dioceses with no bishops, plus 109 bishoprics and bishops, with two bishops mistakenly mentioned twice (followed by the exact total number, CVII), plus the formula *et cathedrae quae episcopos non*

habuerunt followed by 6 names of dioceses (followed by an incorrect number, V);

- In Mauretania Caesariensis, 120 bishoprics and bishops plus the formula *et cathedrae quae episcopos non habuerunt* followed by six names of dioceses (followed by an incorrect number, III);
- In Mauretania Sitifensis, 42 bishoprics and bishops (followed by an incorrect number, XLIIII).

The total number of Catholic bishops mentioned in the text has traditionally been identified as 466,⁵⁵ although the list bears a series of inconsistencies and incorrect information that has been variously discussed.⁵⁶ The recent reanalysis by Modéran considers the purpose of the list, the exact date of its creation, and the exact number of bishops, on the basis of a reconsideration of certain abbreviations listed next to some of the names.⁵⁷ It is significant to note that Victor Vitensis stated that the Vandals did not substitute bishops when they died or were exiled, which may explain this reduction.⁵⁸ Moreover, the general distribution of bishoprics in the territory differs substantially from the list recorded in 411. The most evident divergence is the low number of bishops recorded in Africa Proconsularis, which clearly contrasts with the data from the conference of 411. This can be explained by the fact that the major persecutions against Catholics, immediately after the Vandal conquest of Carthage in 439, took place principally in Africa Proconsularis. In Byzacena the situation is reversed, and the number of bishops indicated in 484 is greater than the number in 411.⁵⁹ Serge Lancel has identified a possible reason for

52 The most recent edition of the list has been published by S. Lancel, in Victor Vitensis, *Histoire de la Persécution Vandale en Afrique, La passion des Sept Martyrs, Registre des provinces et des cités d'Afrique: Textes établis, traduits et commentés par S. Lancel* (Paris, 2002). A re-analysis of the text, taking into consideration Lancel's work, has been published by Y. Modéran, "La Notitia Provinciarum et Civitatum Africae et l'histoire du Royaume Vandale," *AnTard* 14 (2006): 165–85.

53 Although Victor Vitensis informs us that bishops were convoked and consulted by the Vandal kings at least three other times: *Histoire de la Persécution* 1.19, in 440; 1.43, in 457; and 2.15, in 480.

54 See the synthetic table in Modéran, "La Notitia," 166; see also N. Duval, "L'Évêque et la cathédrale," 346 for a complete bibliography on the subject.

55 Modéran, "La Notitia," 167. Noël Duval suggested that they were 470 in total: N. Duval, "L'Évêque et la cathédrale," 346.

56 Before the recent works by Serge Lancel and Yves Modéran mentioned in n. 52, the text had been discussed and considered in detail by C. Courtois, *Victor de Vita et son œuvre: Étude critique* (Algiers, 1954).

57 On the number of bishops see more recently Modéran, "La Notitia," 174–75 and Victor Vitensis, *Histoire de la Persécution*, 237–43.

58 Modéran, "La Notitia," 170.

59 S. Lancel, "Originalité de la province ecclésiastique de Byzacène aux IV^e et V^e siècles," *Les Cahiers de Tunisie* 45–46 (1964): 139–53, esp. 144 suggests a total number of bishops in 411 of between 70 or

this discrepancy through a comparison of the bishops recorded in the two lists. The missing ones are principally those from dioceses with toponyms ending in *-iana*, *-ianum*. These toponyms, as discussed above, can be connected with rural bishoprics. He suggests that this absence in 411 is due to the way in which bishops were convoked to conferences: bishops had to be called on by the provincial governors and *possessores*, but the *possessores* often claimed independence and did not follow imperial orders, including failing to call the bishops from their estates to conferences.⁶⁰ However, there is another issue that makes it particularly difficult to interpret this list: for Byzacena and Mauretania it is almost impossible to physically locate the seats, as many of the toponyms have been completely changed in modern times. This is probably due to the fact that the toponyms of estates are often not recorded through inscriptions or are otherwise difficult to trace.⁶¹ The lack of precision in the indication of the bishoprics makes it difficult to analyze this document comparatively for the other provinces.

The presence of Arian bishops further complicates the matter. The liturgy and religious buildings of both traditions are the same,⁶² so it is impossible to distinguish them archaeologically. It should be noted, though, that the total number of Vandals who entered Africa, as indicated by Victor Vitensis, was very limited; their presence in the territory probably had little impact on the landscape, and they were principally located in Proconsularis, where the major persecution of Catholics took place.⁶³ It is thus probable that

the Arian bishops were few and had limited power.⁶⁴ Moreover, in some areas bishops started to acquire more importance in their territories; for instance, some rural churches connected with olive presses have been dated to the Vandal period. One such example is El Gousset located near the city of Ammaedara (Haidra) in Proconsularis or Zeugitana, which was certainly in use in 521. Here there is a church, a baptistery, and a chapel with relics, as well as olive presses that appear to be connected with the church.⁶⁵ The network of urban and rural bishoprics may have continued to exist there during the Vandal period, subject to the period of harsh persecutions against the Catholics. If these persecutions took place principally in Proconsularis, then it can be argued that elsewhere the bishoprics remained relatively unchanged, as did the power of those bishops who had not been exiled.

The Byzantine Period

The number of bishops and their organization is thought to have remained essentially unchanged, especially in terms of their distribution, well into the Byzantine period. Previous historiography suggests a trend toward stability in the number and organization of bishops, but without a clear understanding of their importance and their role in both civic and religious life.⁶⁶

Vitensis, 1.2: . . . *qui reperti sunt, senes, iuuenes, paruuli, serui uel domini, octoginta milia numerati*. . . .

64 Some Arian bishops are known: one is mentioned by Victor Vitensis 3.29 at Tipasa; at Ammaedara (Haidra) there is an epitaph mentioning an “episcopus Vandalorum” (N. Duval, *Recherches archéologiques à Haidra*, vol. 1, *Les Inscriptions chrétiennes* [Rome, 1975], 87–88); at Turrus Tamalleni is mentioned by Victor Vitensis (3.42–46 and 53–54) a bishop, probably Arian. For a discussion on the Vandal presence in Africa see Modéran, “L’établissement territorial des Vandales,” esp. 89.

65 F. Béjaoui, “L’architecture et le décor: État des découvertes d’époque chrétienne des dix dernières années en Tunisie,” *AnTard* 10 (2002): 197, 211, esp. 205. Annexed to the church a chapel with martyr relics was found and one inscription in the building refers to the reign of the Vandal king Thrasamund (521). On the inscription see F. Béjaoui, “L’église d’el Gousset,” *Africa* 13 (1995): 101–22.

66 See for instance J. Durliat, “Les attributions civiles des évêques byzantins: L’exemple du diocèse d’Afrique (533–709),” in *16. Internationaler Byzantinistenkongress (Wien 4.–9. Oktober 1981), Akten 2, 2. Kurzbeiträge, 4: Soziale Strukturen und ihre Entwicklung* (Wien, 1982), 73–84. See also J. Durliat, “Évêque et administration municipale au VII^e siècle,” in *La fin de la cité antique et le début de la cité médiévale de la fin du III^e siècle à l’avènement de Charlemagne*,

80 and 114, although in the discussion he then specifies 117 bishops (120 are suggested by Victor Vitensis in 484).

60 Lancel, “Originalité de la province,” 144–45. Lancel also suggests as a second reason for the discrepancy the presence of other religious movements in the territory (150–51).

61 For a detailed analysis see Victor Vitensis, *Histoire de la Persécution*, 246–47. Also in Numidia and Proconsularis the name has sometimes been transformed, but the original toponym can be suggested; this is the case for Vcensis/Verensis in Proconsularis and Masculitanus/Marculitanus in Numidia (Victor Vitensis, 245).

62 The only substantial difference was in the formula used during baptism; see M. Meslin, *Les Ariens d’Occident, 335–430*, *Patristica Sorboniensia* 8 (Paris, 1967), 386.

63 Y. Modéran, “Une guerre de religion: Les deux églises d’Afrique à l’époque vandale,” *AnTard* 11 (2003): 21–44, esp. 38–39, and for a detailed discussion see also Y. Modéran, “L’établissement territorial des Vandales en Afrique,” *AnTard* 10 (2002): 87–122. The exact number of 80,000 Vandals entering North Africa is provided by Victor

The Number of Bishops

The data do not allow a discussion of the number and distribution of bishops at the same level throughout North Africa. Each province needs to be looked at separately to see whether comparisons with the previous period are possible, and even then the conclusions remain hypothetical. Africa Proconsularis and Byzacena seem to have had a fairly high number of bishops at the Carthaginian Synod of 646.⁶⁷ Proconsularis had the higher number, at sixty-three, of which twelve had never previously been recorded and were presumably new creations.⁶⁸ Byzacena had forty bishops, of which five are newly attested.⁶⁹ The presence of new bishoprics in both provinces suggests reorganization. The greater presence of the Vandals in Proconsularis (and perhaps in some parts of Byzacena) may in fact have provoked the reorganization of bishoprics after the Byzantine conquest. For the other provinces, the number of bishoprics has been calculated on the basis of scattered references from the sixth or seventh century, and not on a conciliar list, making comparisons problematic. In Numidia seventeen seats are recorded, of which only one was newly created.⁷⁰ The drastic reduction in number may again be the effect of the drop of rural seats that had been in the majority in 411. Finally, seven bishops were identified in Mauretania and four in Tripolitania, but no new bishoprics are recorded.

The Role of the Bishops in Byzantine North Africa

The lower number of bishops in the Byzantine period is due in part to the strong Donatist presence earlier

and to persecutions in the Vandal period, but probably also to the role the bishops played within the territory in this later phase. Evidence from other parts of the Mediterranean in the sixth century indicates that bishops were wealthy landowners with vast estates, who received rents and tribute in the name of the church. The traditional interpretation is that bishops were responsible for the payment and collection of taxes.⁷¹ In this reconstruction, the agents of the *praefectus*, governor, or duke were responsible for establishing the tax charge every year and for punishing those who did not pay, but they did not physically collect the payments, which was instead the duty of the bishops.⁷² The involvement of the bishop in civic organization has been explained by suggesting that he belonged to the group of *principales*, *primates*, *priores*, who controlled urban areas from the fourth century.⁷³ This hypothesis is based on a series of assumptions that the data in North Africa cannot support⁷⁴ and that are more rel-

71 Durliat, "Les attributions civiles," 73–74.

72 Ibid., 74–75. For a recent summary of the economic organization in the west see J. Moorhead, "The Byzantines in the West in the 6th Century," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 1, c. 500–c. 700, ed. P. Fouracre (Cambridge, 2005), 118–39.

73 Durliat, "Les attributions civiles," 74–5; see also 82 n. 14. The assumption is based on Jones, *Later Roman Empire* (n. 39 above), 731. However, Jones refers to the existence in North Africa of *principales* who "were not a mere caucus, but an officially recognised body. A kind of executive committee of the council, which tended to usurp its function," but there is no reference or document mentioned here that could sustain the idea that bishops were part of the *principales*.

74 The main reference to North Africa appears in the *Johannis* (3.275–82) by Corippus, where mention is made of Africa and the Carthaginians and where, according to Durliat, the *Sidonii patres* cited in the text are the *curiales* of Carthage: Durliat, "Les attributions civiles," 82 n. 15. For the text of Corippus see *La Johannide ou Sur les Guerres de Libye*, intro. and comm. C. Teurfs, trans. J.-C. Didier (Paris, 2007). In the Latin text, Corippus refers to the patricians of Carthage favored by Justinian after the defeat of the Vandals, but he does not refer specifically to representatives of the clergy among the members of the aristocracy in the city. See on this Corippus, *La Johannide*, 51 and 161 nn. 59–60. Durliat, "Les attributions civiles," 82 n. 15 also mentions Corippus 6.59–63; again in this case reference is made to the wealthy city of Carthage in the Justinianic period, but there is no specific reference to the clergy or to the role of the clergy within the city (Corippus, *La Johannide*, 86). Finally, Durliat mentions Procopius 4.23.18 and 13 where *λόγιοι* and *δόκιμοι* refer to the *curiales* of Hadrumetum. The episode narrated by Procopius refers also to the priest Paulus, who was in charge of the people affected by illness and who was sent to Carthage to ask for the support of an army; the text mentions the nobles, but there is no specific reference suggesting that the clergy formed part of them.

ed. C. Lepelley (Bari, 1996), 273–86, although the focus in this case is wider and does not specifically consider North Africa.

67 Bishops recorded at the synod are mentioned in Mansi, esp. vol. 10, and J.-L. Maier, *L'épiscopat romaine, vandale et byzantine*, Bibliotheca Helvetica Romana 11 (Rome, 1973).

68 The number has been calculated on the basis of the complete list provided by Fedalto, "Liste vescovili" (n. 9 above). The 12 new bishops recorded are: Absallensis Ecclesia (Absa Salla), Bulnensis Ecclesia, and Tadduensis Ecclesia (Thisiduo?) in Mansi, 10:940; Caeciritana Ecclesia, Hortensis Ecclesia, and Suensis Ecclesia in Mansi, 10:941; Egugensis Ecclesia, Pariensis Ecclesia, Tabucensis Ecclesia, and Zarnensis Ecclesia in Mansi, 10:939; Mattianensis Ecclesia in Maier, *L'épiscopat romaine*, 82.

69 These are: Mibiarcentis Ecclesia (Mibiarca) and Tagagensis Ecclesia (Tagasa) in Maier, *L'épiscopat romaine*, 80; Tamazeni Ecclesia and Taraquensis Ecclesia (Taraqua) in ibid., 81; Sasuritana Ecclesia (Sasura) in ibid., 82.

70 Tulliensis Ecclesia (Thullium) recorded in 525, CCSL 149:271.

evant to the Eastern Empire, where documents attest this trend and where the overlap between the administrative and religious borders of the dioceses began at an early phase.⁷⁵ This is not to say that we need to exclude the possibility, but simply that it cannot be proven with certainty, and that in North Africa the rise of the clergy developed according to the needs of the existing territorial and social organization. Chris Wickham sees the post-curial government as a rather informal governing body whose characteristics and organizational processes changed according to location.⁷⁶ In this view, understanding the bishops' function implies understanding the role that the Christian community played in selecting them. It has been suggested that the fourth century saw a change in the way in which bishops were chosen, with local populations becoming progressively less involved, a process that is more evident in the east.⁷⁷ Previous scholarship sees the emperors and kings acquiring significant control over the choice of bishops, as well as in the election process.⁷⁸ It is certainly arguable that this occurred, in all phases, though principally in connection with important sees, but the question has to be considered on a case-by-case basis.⁷⁹ For instance, the case of Antoninus of Fussala suggests that elections at minor centers (and probably also in rural areas) were strongly influenced by the local population.⁸⁰

75 J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Decline and Fall of the Roman City* (Oxford, 2001), 145–50. The involvement of the clergy in secular activities has also been questioned (38 and 140–41).

76 C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2005), 596–602, esp. 599. He suggests that *curiae* progressively lost their role. For some comments on the political involvement of the bishops in civic power see also Eck, "Der Episkopat im Spätantiken Africa" (n. 6 above), *passim*.

77 See on this P. Norton, *Episcopal Elections 250–600: Hierarchy and Popular Will in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2007), 6. For some detailed considerations on the east see also C. Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in the Age of Transition* (Berkeley, 2005).

78 See S. Gryson, "Les élections épiscopales au III^{ème} siècle," *RHE* 68 (1973): 353–404, and idem, "Les élections épiscopales au IV^{ème} siècle," *RHE* 74 (1979): 301–44 (part 1) and *RHE* 75 (1980): 257–83 (part 2).

79 Norton, *Episcopal Elections*, 240 suggested that the Vandal kings influenced all the elections of bishops (Arian and Catholic), since this was seen as essential for controlling the territory.

80 This is one of the principal points of Norton, *Episcopal Elections*, 244; note general comments and other examples.

Continuing the analysis of the African evidence in the Byzantine period for bishops involved in secular activities, it has been claimed that members of the clergy were in charge of building fortified structures.⁸¹ However, only one inscription in North Africa mentions the building of a fortification in reference to a bishop or member of the clergy.⁸² This is the inscription of a private individual that refers to the period under Bishop Faustinus: dated between the end of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh century, it does not attest to the actual involvement of a member of the clergy in the construction of a fortification.⁸³ It has also been suggested that bishops were actively involved in the restoration of small unofficial fortifications, and that in such cases the decision may have been made personally by the bishop, using his position and his access to municipal funds.⁸⁴ This is possible, although there is no specific evidence at the moment in North Africa either from archaeological sources or from texts to support this.

The role of bishops in North Africa needs to be better defined. The evidence indicates that the bishops, at least from the beginning until the end of the sixth century, were strong religious figures. Inscriptions, especially from the Byzantine period, show that bishops were personally involved in religious ceremonies, such as the deposition of relics (not only in the city but also in the whole territory under their control), a phenomenon that becomes more common from the second half of the sixth to the beginning of the seventh century, suggesting that the bishop had by then acquired a certain symbolic importance. Information on practices related to relics and their deposition is very limited. The councils of the church mention only one canon

81 Durliat, "Les attributions civiles," 77.

82 For a collection of inscriptions referring to the building of a fortified complex see J. Durliat, *Les dédicaces d'ouvrages de défense dans l'Afrique Byzantine*, CEFR 49 (Rome, 1981). For a detailed collection of all the forts and fortifications (including their history) in North Africa, see D. Pringle, *The Defence of Byzantine Africa from Justinian to the Arab Conquest*, 2 vols., BAR International Series 99 (Oxford, 1981), especially vol. 1. For some general comments on African fortification in the Byzantine period and their functional and symbolic meaning, see Leone, *Changing Townscapes* (n. 21 above), 187–98.

83 Durliat, *Les dédicaces*, no. 32: (cross) *In nomine D(omi)ni D(ei) n(ostri) atque / salbatoris, Ih(es)u (Chr)(ist)i, / temporib(us) biri beatissimi / Faustini, ep(i)sc(op)i, hec munitio fund{i} / Masticana exunto proprio fecit.*

84 Durliat, *Les dédicaces*, 99–100.

dedicated to relics: *De falsis memoriis martyrum*, dated to 401 in Carthage, and recalled and summarized in 525.⁸⁵ This canon does not refer to the deposition of relics by bishops, nor does it indicate that only relics deposited by bishops could be considered “true relics.” It indicates instead that bishops were responsible for assuring that “false relics” were not venerated. (The Donatist issue probably contributed to the discussion of false relics.) The text suggests that relics were not necessarily deposited directly by bishops at this time, an interpretation supported by the inscriptions. Similarly, Augustine on three occasions mentions a deposition of relics, and in only one case, at Guelma, can it be suggested that the deposition was made by a bishop.⁸⁶ But this was an urban settlement.⁸⁷

In the later period there are fourteen inscriptions from North Africa attesting to bishops who were actively involved in the deposition of relics in churches. Thirteen of them are dated between the second half of the sixth century and the beginning of the seventh; one is dated to 452, but it may not refer to a bishop. These inscriptions follow two different formulae: one, which is probably the earlier, refers to relics *deposite* (or *posite*) *ab episcopo*; the other specifically says *per manus episcopi*.⁸⁸ On the basis of the epigraphic evidence, Yvette Duval suggests that before the second half of the sixth century, the rite of deposition did not require

the presence of the bishop, but was carried out by the local presbyter.⁸⁹ This may reflect the increasing importance of the deposition of relics in religious rituals. It may also show that the presence of the bishop in his territory became more important, perhaps in order to give stronger support to the local community. From a strictly liturgical perspective, this may be connected to the process of the acquisition of relics attested by the *Liber diurnus Romanorum pontificum*.⁹⁰ This document is dated to the ninth century, but it appears to record material from the second half of the sixth to the seventh century.⁹¹ The document refers to the construction of a new church by a patron in order to acquire the officially recognized relics. He had to ask the pope to provide the relics of the saint and a dedication for the altar. The pope contacted the bishop of the diocese where the grave of the saint was located and, once the relics were acquired, the bishop of the diocese where the new church was built became responsible for their deposition. This official process was probably set up in order to control the distribution and type of relics that were venerated. The Canon *De falsis memoriis martyrum* indicates early on the difficulties (especially in North Africa) over the veneration of relics. It is arguable that in the Byzantine period, as attested by the *Liber Diurnus*, the increased power of the bishop, on behalf of the pope, had become necessary. The bishops may also have considered the acquisition of relics as a way of consolidating their power within the territory,⁹²

85 Concilium at Carthage in 401: *Concilia Africae* (n. 40 above), 204–5, 754–66: *De Falsis Memoriis Martyrum* (754–58): *Item placuit ut altaria quae passim per agros et per vias tamquam memoriae martyrum instituuntur, in quibus nullum corpus aut reliquiae martyrum conditae probantur, ab episcopis qui locis eisdem praesunt, si fieri potest, evertantur*. The same canon was also reconsidered and summarized in 525 (*Concilia Africae*, 266, H, 456–58: *Ubi supra: ut nulla memoria martyrum acceptetur nisi ubi corpus aut reliquiae aut origo alicuius habitationis fideliter traditur*). See on this also Y. Duval, *Loca Sanctorum Africae* (Paris, 1982), 543–48; as pointed out there, the document seems to create a sort of confusion between relics and altars.

86 For a detailed discussion on the little information provided by Augustine, see Duval, *Loca Sanctorum*, 546.

87 *De Civitate dei* 22.8.12 (PL 41): *Eucharius est presbyter ex Hispania, Calamae habitat, veteri morbo calculi laborabat; per memoriam supradicti martyris, quam Possidius illo advexit episcopus salvus factus est. . .*

88 For a collection of the inscriptions see D. Mazzoleni, “Vescovi e cattedrali nella documentazione epigrafica in Occidente (Gallia, Iberia, Africa),” in *Actes du XI^e Congrès* (n. 1 above), 779–800; the inscriptions are published and discussed in detail in Duval, *Loca Sanctorum*, 572–73.

89 Duval, *Loca Sanctorum*, 574.

90 E. A. B. De Sickel, ed., *Liber Diurnus Romanorum Pontificum ex unico codice Vaticano* (Vienna, 1889), 9–11: *Petitio dedicationis oratorii, Responsum oratorii dedicandi, Responsum de speranda sanctuaria*, and esp. *De Dandis Sanctuariis*, where it is specified that the bishop is responsible for depositing the relics. See also: 16.21: *Episcopo de levandis sanctuariis: Noverit fraternitas tua pro reliquiis nobis beati martyris ill. necessario opus esse, ut in loco qui venerationi ipsius dedicandus est collocetur. Atque ideo presentibus affatibus ill. sedis nostrae secundum consuetam reverentiam levatas reliquias contradere omitas, ut ad nos secundum quod ei iniunctum est // quantocius valeat deportari*.

91 For details on the Vatican manuscript see the official Vatican website http://www.vatican.va/library_archives/vat_secret_archives/collections/documents/vsa_doc_20051999_libdiu_it.html (accessed 30 August 2010). For a discussion on the chronology and its origin see Marco Palma, “L’origine del Codice Vaticano del Liber Diurnus,” *Scrittura e Civiltà* 4 (1980): 295–310.

92 A. Monaci Castagno, “Reliquiae,” in *Nuovo Dizionario patristico e di antichità cristiane*, vol. 3 (Genoa, 2008), col. 4494–99. From the 4th century the demand for relics became so great that it would

further reinforced by the local populations who could support the bishops through the electoral process.⁹³

Inscriptions offer further important evidence:⁹⁴ some documents in the second half of the sixth century refer to depositions with the name of the local governor alongside that of the bishop. A lead plaque from Silia, dated 585, mentions *magister militum* Gennadius;⁹⁵ at Telergma, the patrician Peter (probably exarch of Africa) is indicated.⁹⁶ In the latter case the date of the emperor is mentioned before the relics, the only such example in North Africa. This has been interpreted as resulting from the involvement of the imperial chancellery in depositions.⁹⁷ The reference to civic officers and official dates may reflect an increasingly close connection between the state and the activity of bishops within their territories. Evidence (archaeological and epigraphic) in fact seems to suggest that from this later Byzantine phase the bishop had a more active presence within his territory, probably resulting from a more organized cooperation between the civic and religious powers. This practice probably resulted from the progressively frequent application of Novel 137 of Justinian, which regulated church rituals. This indicates that all actions undertaken by the bishops were under the direct control of the governor.⁹⁸ The particular situation of the North African dioceses and the primatial church of Carthage also seems to have required intervention by Justinian with Novel 37, focused on

regulating the relationship between the North African church and the empire.⁹⁹

Inscriptions do not generally specify the diocese to which the bishop belonged, suggesting that the deposition ceremony was probably carried out by the bishop within the territory under his jurisdiction. Yvette Duval points out that where the seat of a bishop is not mentioned the deposition was probably made in the city that was the see of the bishop. In this light, the inscriptions mentioned here suggest that the settlements of Sila, Aïn Guigba, Henchir Fellous, and Mezloug were, in the mid-sixth century, bishoprics, while Henchir Hakrib and Telergma may not have had a bishop.¹⁰⁰ Sila is the *Siliensis Ecclesia* attested in 411 and 525, but the identification for Aïn Guigba, Henchir Fellous, and Mezloug is more difficult as the ancient names are unknown and archaeology cannot add to this.¹⁰¹

At Telergma, forty kilometers southwest of Constantine, four bishops from other territories are mentioned on a lead plaque, which describes the phases of the ceremony.¹⁰² The document refers to St. Stephen, and a second name is fragmentary, but may refer to Phocas, although this would be the first evidence of the cult of that martyr in North Africa.¹⁰³ A third name is probably that of Teudorus.¹⁰⁴ The activities of the bishops are introduced by the expression *per manus*, and this is the only instance where the four bishops are

have been impossible to satisfy the request of every single city and settlement through the fragmentation and translation of the saints' bodies. So objects associated with the saints started to be venerated as well, and there was a need for stricter control.

93 According to Norton (*Episcopal Elections*, 241) it is clearly arguable, as reflected in Justinianic legislation, that the local populations and rich elites progressively had more influence in the election of bishops. This transformation developed in parallel with the strengthening of power by the bishops themselves.

94 Usually inscriptions relating to the deposition of relics are very limited. They bear only the name of the martyr without more detailed information: Duval, *Loca Sanctorum*, 555.

95 Duval, *Loca Sanctorum*, 215, no. 106.

96 Ibid., 233–39, no. 112.

97 Ibid., 567.

98 From Justinian, Novella 137, translated by S. P. Scott in *The Civil Law* (Cincinnati, 1932), 17:152–56. See on this also B. Albanese, “Giustiniano ed il silenzio del Canone: Nota sulla Novella 137,” *Studia et Documenta Historiae et Iuris* 33 (1967): 19–39.

99 Nov. 37, *De Africana Ecclesia*. It was directed to Solomon, *praefectus praetorium* of Africa at that moment. The novel sought to address three topics: ecclesiastical property; the relationship between orthodoxy and heretical movements; and the privileges of the clergy and the church. For some further comments on this novel and further bibliography see: S. Puliatti, *Ricerche sulle Novelle di Giustino II: La legislazione imperiale da Giustiniano I a Giustino II*, vol. 2, *Problemi di diritto privato e di legislazione e politica religiosa* (Milan, 1991).

100 See Duval, *Loca Sanctorum*, 574.

101 Ibid., 277 (Aïn Guigba), 44 (Henchir Fellous), 316 (Mezloug, inscription now lost). Nothing is known about the buildings in which the inscriptions were found.

102 Ibid., 231–39, no. 112; see also Y. Duval and P.-A. Février, “Procès verbal de déposition de reliques de la région de Telergma (VII^e siècle),” *MEFR* (1969): 257–320. The chronology suggested is between 22 January and 4 October 636 (Duval, *Loca Sanctorum*, 236).

103 The cult is widely distributed in the east and from the beginning of the 5th c. in the west, but it is fairly unknown in North Africa (Duval, *Loca Sanctorum*, 237).

104 This cult is widely distributed in North Africa in the Byzantine period (ibid., 237).

collectively mentioned. Their names are uncertain and, therefore, the identification of their seats is unclear.¹⁰⁵ What is significant is the plurality of the bishops; they must all have been in that place at the same time, perhaps for a special occasion, such as a council. However, no evidence is recorded of such an event in Carthage in 636, so this may refer to a regional council at Cirta.¹⁰⁶

In two other cases, inscriptions refer to the involvement of bishops in the dedication of a church, namely the church of St. Digna at Rusicade (Skikda) by Bishop Navigius, and of St. Salsa at Tipasa by Bishop Potentius.¹⁰⁷ These attest to the involvement of bishops in the ceremonial dedication of the church,¹⁰⁸ but not necessarily to the economic aspects of its construction.

The presence of bishops in the countryside has previously been assumed from the evidence of baptisteries in rural churches; this occurs in the church at Sidi Habich, located near Uppenna, which was the seat of a bishop.¹⁰⁹ Noël Duval points out that the presence of a baptistery cannot be considered as evidence of a cathedral and the seat of the bishop. The existence of a baptistery rather indicates that the bishop was personally visiting rural churches to baptize the local people;¹¹⁰ this would prove once more the need for a bishop in rural areas and his personal involvement, both symbolic and religious, within his diocese.

All these data, in fact, seem to suggest that the bishop was an important religious figure and his presence in the territory was permanently required. The evidence is clearer from the end of the sixth to the beginning of the seventh century, when the involvement of the bishop seems to have become essential.

The Ecclesiastical Organization of a Territory: The Case of Northern Africa Proconsularis

In order to provide a rounded picture of the evidence and a better understanding of the distribution and organization of bishoprics, a specific area of North Africa will be presented as a case study and considered diachronically from the fourth to the sixth century. This synthetic reconstruction uses both archaeological evidence and texts. The territory of Hippo Regius has already been considered above; Serge Lancel¹¹¹ and Jean Peyras¹¹² have each tried to define and analyze the presence of bishops in other parts of northern Africa Proconsularis, which had a large number of cities.

Lancel analyzed four areas in Africa Proconsularis with the aim of determining whether there was any coherence in the early distribution of bishoprics: he sought to discover whether bishops were mainly located in *municipia* or *coloniae* rather than in *pagi*, and whether towns that acquired civic status as *municipia* or *coloniae* earlier became bishoprics before the others. He was not, however, able to identify a clear pattern or planned distribution of bishoprics based on an organized civic network. One conclusion that can be drawn is that ecclesiastical boundaries in North Africa, at least in their earlier phase up to the sixth century, did not necessarily overlap with civic ones, and the criteria for the distribution of bishops were not the same as those for the organization of Roman provinces.

The areas that Serge Lancel researched in Africa Proconsularis are located along the Mejerda, in northern Tunisia. They are very close to the tell in northeast Tunisia that was discussed by Jean Peyras. Here, the five analyzed areas (four by Lancel and one by Peyras) will be reconsidered together, with a degree of chronological and geographical expansion. The aim is not to develop an exhaustive analysis of the formation of the dioceses, but rather to provide, for the first time, a picture of a specific area in Africa Proconsularis, which can be used as a starting point for further research and analysis.¹¹³

105 For an attempt at the identification see *ibid.*, 238.

106 *Ibid.*, 239 and Mazzoleni, *Vescovi e cattedrali*, 789.

107 Mazzoleni, *Vescovi e cattedrali*, 792 and Duval, *Loca Sanctorum*, 184 no. 91 and 358 no. 170.

108 Duval, "L'Évêque et la cathédrale," 372.

109 *Ibid.*, 364.

110 Originally only the bishop had the right to baptize (*ibid.*, 360); on the presence of bishops in the territory in connection with the baptistery in Syria see B. Dufay, "A propos du baptême: L'évêque, la ville et la campagne," in *Actes du XI^e Congrès* (n. 1 above), 637–50.

111 Lancel, "Évêchés et cités," 284–86; 273–90.

112 J. Peyras, *Le Tell Nord-Est Tunisien dans l'Antiquité* (Paris, 1991), esp. 354–62.

113 Throughout this section, see table page 10 and Lancel, "Évêchés et cités," 277–82.

1. The region around Bulla Regia and Simitthu will be considered first. At Bulla Regia the first bishop is attested in 256, in the *Sententiae Episcoporum* (fig. 2), and bishops are attested again in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries (figs. 3, 4). Saia Maior, to the north, is not attested as a bishopric before 411¹¹⁴ and neither are Thuburnica in the east and Simitthu in the west.¹¹⁵ Thunusida, in the far west, appears to have been recorded as a bishopric already by 401.¹¹⁶

2. The second area under consideration (see again figs. 2, 3, 4) is located between the Wadi Tessa and the Wadi Siliana, which was highly urbanized during the Roman period, and where the cities are about five kilometers apart. Here, in 256, Agbia (Ain Hedja) and Thugga (Dougga) had bishops.¹¹⁷ In a circle around these two cities of about a twelve-kilometer radius there are two cities that did not have a bishop until the fourth or fifth centuries: Musti and Uchi Maius.¹¹⁸ Two *pagi* never had a bishop: Suttua and Assali.

3. Another area investigated by Lancel is in the same region, but toward the northeast, at the confluence

of the Mejerda river and the Wadi Siliana. Two bishops are mentioned, one at Membressa (Medjez el Bab) and one at Abitina (Chouhoud Al Bâtin), both in 256: the two urban settlements are less than five kilometers apart. Other cities along the same road network (more or less five kilometers apart), were, conversely, never bishoprics: Chidibba (Sloughia) and Tichilla (Testour). Thignica (Ain Tounga), nearby, has a bishop who attended the conference in 411.¹¹⁹ Analyzing these data, Lancel suggests that the territories without a bishopric were under the jurisdiction of Tignica to the west and Abitina to the east, although it is not clear why the subdivision was made in this way.

4. On the other side of the river Mejerda, in the area of the high valley of the Wadi Tine, there is a series of settlements. Aulodes (Sidi Raissa) never had a bishop, but Auedda (Henchir Bedd), three kilometers south of Aulodes, and Vazari,¹²⁰ to the north, both had a bishop in 397 and probably 411. No bishops are recorded at the nearby settlement of Chiniava.¹²¹

Following the river Mejerda toward the north as far as the northeastern tell considered by Peyras, a few sites are present. These include five settlements with a bishop; one of them, Thibari, was recorded already in 256, while four of them are attested between the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth century: Thubursicu Bure, Numluli, Villa Magna, and Buruni, probably including Saltus Burunitanus.¹²² Sustri and Aversa never had a bishopric.

114 See *Sententiae Episcoporum* (n. 11 above), 81: Therapius a Bulla, and Lancel, "Évêchés et cités," 277 n. 16, where Lancel points out that it is highly probable that Therapius is from Bulla Regia. In the list of the *Notitia* for 484, together with a bishop from Bulla Regia (Johannes de Bulla Regia—Victor Vitensis, *Histoire de la Persécution*, 254, Proconsularis 50) is also mentioned a certain Felix Bullensis (Victor Vitensis, *Histoire de la Persécution*, 253, Proconsularis 34). This latter is followed by the abbreviation "prbt." Modéran, "La Notitia," 172–75, has recently reconsidered the issue of this abbreviation. A bishop from Bulla Regia is probably attested in 525: *Concilia Africae* (n. 40 above), *Conc. Carth.* 525, 272 (*Quodvultdeus plebis Bullamensis* or *Porphyrius plebis Bullensis*).

115 For Simitthu, Lancel, "Évêchés et cités," 277 refers to the presence of a bishop at the conference at Carthage in 411; the same bishop may have been mentioned in 410.

116 Lancel, "Évêchés et cités," 277 refers to the presence of a Catholic and a Donatist (Victorianus) bishop at the conference in 411. Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église" (n. 10 above), 1293 mentions a bishop probably also in 401 (Ianuarius).

117 For Thugga, in Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1190 there is a reference to Pascasius, a Catholic bishop attending the conference at Carthage in 411.

118 Lancel, "Évêchés et cités," 279, n. 22 points out that the first bishop from Musti is attested at the end of the 4th c. in connection with a confrontation between Maximianists and Primianists: on this event see Mesnage, *L'Afrique Chrétienne*, 118 and J.-L. Maier, *L'épiscopat de l'Afrique romaine* (n. 67 above), 177.

119 Aufidus (Catholic) and Iulianus (Donatist) in 411; Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1291.

120 The identification of the bishop at Auedda has been proposed by Lancel, "Évêchés et cités," 282. Vazari has been located in Numidia, although dubiously, by Fedalto, "Liste vescovi" (n. 9 above), 443.

121 Lancel, "Évêchés et cités," 282 suggests that Chiniava did not have a bishop because it never became a *municipium*, although he also points out that a specific relationship between the statuses of the settlements and the presence or absence of bishoprics does not appear to exist. There is in fact also evidence of *pagi* that acquired a bishop, as for instance the Pagus Thunigabensis (about 20 km from Vaga, Beja).

122 For Thubursicu Bure a bishop is attested, although with some uncertainty, before 393 and 411 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1293). Saltus Burunitanus: see Mesnage, *L'Afrique Chrétienne*, 49 on the definition of the bishopric. Donatus episcopus plebis Buritanae is recorded in 411 and in 477–84; a Faustus Burunitanus is known: Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1253, mentioned by Victor Vitensis,

TABLE Settlements and bishops in the northern region of Africa Proconsularis; dates are in bold

Settlement with bishopric	Year when bishop is recorded
Abitina (Chouhoud Al Bâtin)	<i>Saturninus ab Avitinus</i> in 256 (<i>Sententiae Episcoporum</i> [n. 11 above], 87); <i>Fundanus</i> before February 304 , <i>Victor</i> (Catholic) 411 , <i>Reparatus</i> 525 , <i>Gaudiosus</i> 5th c. (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église d'Afrique" [n. 7 above] 1246); <i>Augustalis eccl. Abitinensis</i> 646 (Mesnage, <i>L'Afrique Chrétienne</i> [n. 8 above] 43 and Fedalto, "Liste vescovili" [n. 9 above] 400).
Agbia (Ain Hedja)	<i>Quintus a Acbia</i> 256 (<i>Sententiae Episcoporum</i> , 87); <i>Pascasius Anguiensis</i> 397(?) and 411 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1248; Fedalto, "Liste vescovili," 402); <i>Fortis Agensis</i> 646 (Mesnage, <i>L'Afrique Chrétienne</i> , 84).
Assali (<i>pagus</i>)	No bishop.
Auedda (Henchir Bedda)	<i>Honoratus</i> 397 and 411 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1250).
Aulodes (Sidi Raissa)	No bishop.
Aunobari	No bishop.
Avensa	No bishop.
Biha Bilta	<i>Caecilius a Biltha</i> 256 (<i>Sententia Episcoporum</i> , 9); <i>Felicianus</i> (Donatist) 411 and <i>Restitutus</i> 525 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1252; Fedalto, "Liste vescovili," 405).
Bulla Regia	<i>Therapius a Bulla</i> 256 (<i>Sententiae Episcoporum</i> , 85); <i>Johannes de Bulla Regia</i> 484 (Victor de Vita, <i>Histoire de la Persecution</i> [n. 52 above], Proc. 50, 254); <i>Quodvultdeus episcopus plebis Bullamensis</i> or <i>Porphyrus plebis Bullensis</i> 525 (<i>Concilia Africae</i> [n. 44 above], Conc. Carth. 525, 272); <i>Epigonius</i> 390–99 , <i>Dominicus</i> (Catholic) and <i>Felix</i> (Donatist) 411 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1253); <i>Mellosus Bulleriensis</i> 646 , and a Bishop Φυσάλις Βασιλική is still recorded at the beginning of the 8th c. (Mesnage, <i>L'Afrique Chrétienne</i> , 50; Fedalto, "Liste vescovili," 406–7).
Buruni	No bishop? <i>Saltus Burunitanus</i> ? <i>Donatus</i> 411 ; <i>Faustus</i> 477–84 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1253; Victor de Vita, <i>Histoire de la Persecution</i> , Proc. 1, 11, 38; Fedalto, "Liste vescovili," 407).
Chidibba (Sloughia)—town	No bishop.
Chiniava	No bishop.
Fundus Bassianensis	<i>Valerianus Bassianensis</i> 448–51 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1251 and Fedalto, "Liste vescovili," 551).
Matar	<i>Rusticanus</i> (Donatist) before 411 , <i>Cultasius</i> (Catholic) 411 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1272; Fedalto, "Liste vescovili," 415).
Medd (?)	Probably not a bishopric, see Auedda above.
Melzi (?)	<i>Valerius</i> (Donatist) 394 and <i>Tutus</i> 411 and probably 425 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1273; Fedalto, "Liste vescovili," 417).
Membressa (Medjez el-Bab)	<i>Lucius</i> 256 (<i>Sententia Episcoporum</i> , 85); <i>Saluius</i> (Donatist) 393 , 397 , probably after 404 ; <i>Restitutus</i> (Donatist) 394 , 411 ; <i>Gennadius</i> (Catholic) 411 ; <i>Bonifatius</i> (Catholic) 484 ; <i>Pascasius</i> (Catholic) 525 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1273); <i>Victor</i> 646 (Mansi, <i>Sacrorum Conciliorum</i> [n. 67 above], 10:940; Fedalto, "Liste vescovili," 417).
Musti	End 4th c. (Mesnage, <i>L'Afrique Chrétienne</i> , 118 and Maier, <i>L'épiscopat de l'Afrique</i> [n. 67 above], 177); <i>Leontius</i> (Catholic) and <i>Cresconius</i> (Donatist) 411 , <i>Antinianus</i> 484 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1275); <i>Januarius ecclesia Mustitanae</i> 646 (Mesnage, <i>L'Afrique Chrétienne</i> , 118; a bishop was also nearby at Turris; Fedalto, "Liste vescovili," 419).
Numluli	<i>Aurelius Numlulitanus</i> 411 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1277; Fedalto, "Liste vescovili," 420).

Settlement with bishopric	Year when bishop is recorded
Rucuma	<i>Lucianus a Rucuma</i> 256 (<i>Sententiae Episcoporum</i> , 69); <i>Maximus Rucumensis</i> 646 (Mesnage, <i>L'Afrique Chrétienne</i> , 218; Fedalto, "Liste vescovili," 422).
Saia Maior	<i>Donatus Saiensis</i> 411 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1281).
Simitthu	<i>Benatus Simittensis</i> 410 and 411 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1283); <i>Benenatus Simitensis</i> 646 (Mesnage, <i>L'Afrique Chrétienne</i> , 46; Fedalto, "Liste vescovili," 425).
Suas	<i>Maximus Suensis</i> 646 (Mesnage, <i>L'Afrique Chrétienne</i> , 44; Fedalto, "Liste vescovili," 425).
Sustri	No bishop.
Suttua (pagus)	No bishop.
Thibari	<i>Vincentius</i> 256 (Maier, <i>L'épiscopat de l'Afrique</i> , 428); <i>Victor Tibaritanus</i> (Catholic), <i>Victorianus</i> (Donatist) 411 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1290).
Thignica (Ain Tounga)	<i>Aufidus</i> (Catholic) and <i>Iulianus</i> (Donatist) 411 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1291).
Thuburnica	<i>Aeneas</i> 411 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1289); <i>Crescens Tiburnicensis</i> 646 (Mesnage, <i>L'Afrique Chrétienne</i> , 26; Fedalto, "Liste vescovili," 430).
Thubursicu Bure	<i>Cyprianus</i> (Donatist) before 393 and before 411; <i>Seruus</i> (Catholic) 404, 411, probably 425; <i>Donatus</i> (Donatist) 411 and <i>Reparatus</i> (Catholic) 525 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1293; Fedalto, "Liste vescovili," 430).
Thuccabori	<i>Fortunatus a Thiccabori</i> 256 (<i>Sententiae Episcoporum</i> , 37); <i>Megasius</i> 411 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1293); <i>Stephanus Tuccaborensis</i> 646 (Mesnage, <i>L'Afrique Chrétienne</i> , 162; Fedalto, "Liste vescovili," 430).
Thugga (Dougga)	<i>Honoratus a Tucca</i> 256 (<i>Sententiae Episcoporum</i> , 99); <i>Pascasius</i> 411 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1190); <i>Victor Tagiae</i> may belong to Thugga 646 (Mesnage, <i>L'Afrique Chrétienne</i> , 60; Fedalto, "Liste vescovili," 565).
Thunigaba	<i>Niuentius</i> (Catholic) 411 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1293).
Thunusuda	<i>Ianuarius</i> 401, <i>Ianuarius</i> (Catholic) and <i>Victorianus</i> (Donatist) 411 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1293).
Tichilla (Testour)—town	No bishop.
Uccula	<i>Cericus</i> (Catholic) 411 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église d'Afrique," 1296); <i>Cresconius</i> 646 (Mesnage, <i>L'Afrique Chrétienne</i> , 61; Fedalto, "Liste vescovili," 434).
Uchi Maius	<i>Octavianus Ucitensis</i> (Catholic) 411 and <i>Gaius</i> probably before 484 (?) (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1296); <i>Tripolius Eccl. Ucitanae</i> 646 (Mesnage, <i>L'Afrique Chrétienne</i> , 58; Fedalto, "Liste vescovili," 434).
Ureu	Probably not a bishopric.
Uzali Sar	<i>Sacconius</i> 484 and <i>Mustulus</i> 525 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1299); <i>Victorianus</i> 649 (Schwarz et al., <i>Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum</i> [n. 136 above], 1:7 and Fedalto, 437; Fedalto, "Liste vescovili," 436).
Vazari (Henchir Bejar)	<i>Iulianus</i> 397, <i>Adeodatus</i> (Catholic) and <i>Calipodius</i> (Donatist) 411 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1295); <i>Vitalianus</i> 484 (<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi</i> 3.2:65 [Berlin, 1879]; Fedalto, "Liste vescovili," 443, locates the settlement in Numidia).
Villa Magna	<i>Rogatianus</i> (Donatist) 393 (?) 411 (Pellistrandi, "Fastes de l'Église," 1297; <i>Cyprianus</i> 646 (Mansi, <i>Sacrorum Conciliorum</i> , 10:942).



FIG. 2
Map of the bishoprics along the Mejerda river in Africa Proconsularis in the mid-third century, after J. Desanges, N. Duval, C. Lepelley, and S. Saint-Amans, *Carte des routes et des cités de l'est de l'Afrique à la fin de l'Antiquité d'après le trace de Pierre Salama*, Bibliothèque de l'Antiquité Tardive 17 (Turnhout, 2010)

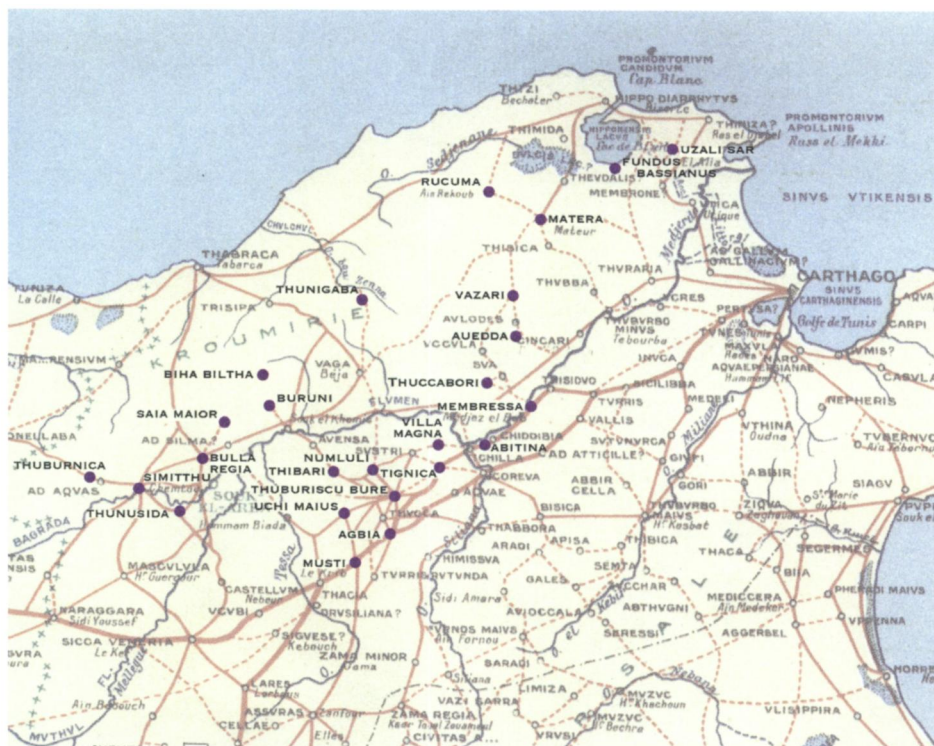


FIG. 3
Map of the bishoprics along the Mejerda valley in Africa Proconsularis between the fourth and the fifth century, after Desanges et al., *Carte des routes*

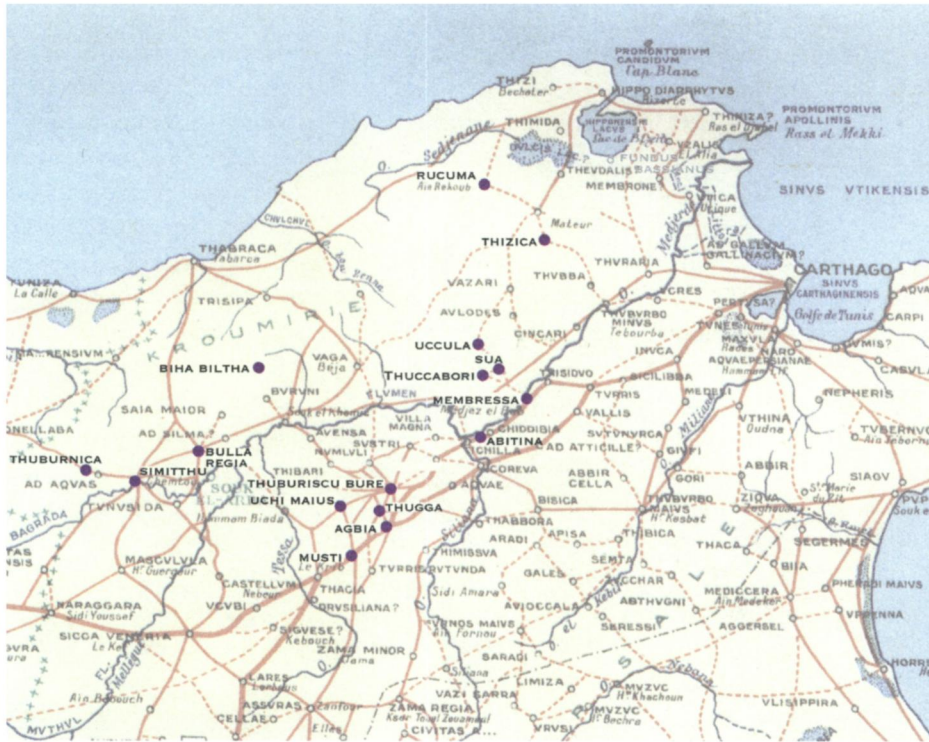


FIG. 4
Map of the bishoprics
along the Mejerda valley
in Africa Proconsularis in
the Byzantine period after
Desanges et al., *Carte des
routes*

5. Finally, the area considered by Peyras¹²³ includes different types of settlements. Thuccabori and Rucuma were already bishoprics by 256 and they both continued to have a bishop until at least the middle of the seventh century. The settlements of Vazari and Matar are mentioned in the Acts of the conference in 411, together with Thunigaba, Uccula, and Melzi. In the case of Medda it has been suggested that Bishop Honoratus Abiddensis, who attended the conference at Carthage, is in fact the bishop of Medda. However, this interpretation is not widely accepted.¹²⁴ In the middle of the

seventh century bishops are still known at Rucuma, Uccula, Thuccabori, and Thizica. Suas, by contrast, appears to have been first attested only in 646, suggesting the creation here of a new bishopric. Peyras also suggested that Exitziosus Uerensis, a bishop mentioned in the list of 484, should be connected with the settlement of Ureu.¹²⁵ However, in the recent publication by Lancel of the *Notitia*, Uerensis is identified with Ucrensis, making him bishop of Ucre in Corsica. Giorgio Fedalto confirms this, but suggests that the settlement of Ucre is located in Tunisia at Borj bou Jadi. The identification proposed by Peyras seems to be weak and currently difficult to accept.¹²⁶ Finally, Uzali Sar and Biha Biltha¹²⁷ appear to have had a bishop at least

Histoire de la Persécution, 114, and K. Vössing, ed., *Historia persecutionis Africanæ provinciae temporum Geiserici et Hunerici regum Wandalorum: Kirchenkampf und Verfolgung unter den Vandalen in Africa* (Darmstadt, 2011), 54 n. 85. For detailed analysis of the identification of the settlement, said to be located in the north of Africa Proconsularis, see Lancel, *Actes de la Conférence de Carthage en 411* (n. 19 above), 4:1336–37.

123 Throughout this paragraph, see Peyras, *Le Tell Nord-Est*, 354–62 and table page 10.

124 Lancel, *Actes de la Conférence de Carthage en 411*, 4:1315. The identification is based on the discovery in the area of the settlement of Avidda and an inscription mentioning Medd. The inscription is today lost and it is impossible to verify the reading. For this reason

Lancel expresses uncertainty about this interpretation and considers Honoratus the bishop of Avidda.

125 Peyras, *Le Tell Nord-Est*, 312 and 356.

126 Victor Vitensis, *Histoire de la Persécution*, Proconsularis 26, and Fedalto, “Liste vescovi,” 434.

127 For Biha Biltha, Peyras only suggests the identification with Felix Piensis in 484, and Restitut Vultensis, although the bishopric is probably attested also: in 256, Caecilius a Biltha (*Sententiae Episcoporum*, 9); in 411, Felicianus (Donatist) and in 525, Restitut (Pellistrandi, “Fastes de l’Église d’Afrique,” 1252).

until the beginning of the sixth century. Within this panorama Peyras suggests that, in the later phase (after it ceased being a bishopric), Uzali Sar probably was a dependant of Thuccabori and Suas; Suas, despite being an important town, did not have a bishop until the middle of the seventh century. This suggests that some sort of reorganization in connection with urban centers may have occurred in the Byzantine period. A bishop in the area also belonged to the Fundus Bassianus in 411. Peyras claims that in the Byzantine period the number of bishops remained more or less the same, although their distribution changed. Thuccabori maintained the same role, but Suas became independent. Matar disappeared, probably under the control of Thizica or Rucuma. Uccula appears to be the only bishopric in the Wadi Tine, and in the southwest a number of bishoprics vanished.



On the basis of this evidence and the various interpretations, some further conclusions can be attempted. From the data available, bishoprics attested for the sample area in 256 total eight, and are all located in the most important urban settlements in the area. Between the end of the fourth to the fifth century the number of bishops more than doubles to twenty-six. This was probably due to the issues with Donatism or to the need to keep the territory under control immediately after the dispute, as seen in Fussala. In this phase bishops in rural settlements such as the Saltus Burunitanus and the Fundus Bassanus are also recorded, but seem to have disappeared in later sources. In the analyzed area, for instance, in the sixth and seventh centuries, numbers do not seem to be as constant as suggested by Peyras, and they in fact drop by about 40%, with bishops in the Byzantine period totaling sixteen. They are all located in urban settlements, although we do not know the exact nature of these settlements in the sixth and seventh centuries. Suas was a new see, recorded for the first time in 646. Although admittedly this may be due to the silence of earlier sources, it may equally indicate that new sees were created in urban areas, perhaps during the reorganization of the territory.

Uchi Maius is recorded as having a bishop in 646. Recent excavations have shown that the settlement was in decline in the sixth and seventh centuries, at least in comparison with the classical Roman town, and even in

the fifth century olive presses were set up in the forum.¹²⁸ Evidence of reoccupation in the forum square between the end of the fifth and the first half of the seventh century is attested archaeologically through the presence of houses and limekilns.¹²⁹ Even where the urban fabric and the monumental character of the city were in decay by the end of the fourth century, a bishopric is still recorded. This evidence corresponds to the data from earlier centuries. The presence of a bishop does not seem to be directly connected to the juridical importance or monumentality of a settlement, but instead represents the presence of a strong Christian community. Chris Wickham suggests that “the move towards the dominance of informal city notables could thus be represented by the deconstructing of the old city.”¹³⁰ If one accepts this idea, it may suggest that the bishop acquired a more important role in the economic life and vitality of the communities, although at the moment there is no ground to suggest that they were also involved in tax collection and redistribution. Some centers in urban North Africa appear to have had an early phase of decay in the public city center, while in others the classical urban structure appears to have survived for longer, until the end of the sixth century.¹³¹ In Bulla Regia, in the fifth century, the forum was already showing signs of reorganization.¹³² The center of the city moved near the large double basilica and a series of fortified structures was constructed along the main connecting route through the city. The bishopric,

128 C. Vismara, “Aetas succedit aetati: Il riuso di element#classici nelle città africane fino all’età islamica,” in *Atti X Giornata di Archeologia: Il passato riproposto; Continuità e recupero dall’antichità ad oggi*, ed. B. M. Giannattasio (Genoa, 1999), 69–85, esp. 73, and S. Gelichi and M. Milanese, “Problems in the Transition towards the Medieval in the Ifriqya: First Results from the Archaeological Excavations at Uchi Maius (Teboursouk, Beja),” *Africa Romana* 12 (1997): 457–86, esp. 463.

129 M. Khanoussi and A. Mastino, *Uchi Maius*, vol. 1, *Scavi e ricerche epigrafiche in Tunisia* (Sassari, 1997), 79. For detailed consideration of the destiny of the city from Late Antiquity see Leone, *Changing Townscapes* (n. 21 above), 135–43.

130 Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, 598.

131 For a synthesis on the destiny of cities in North Africa from late antiquity to the early Arab period, see Leone, *Changing Townscapes*, 281–87.

132 A tomb was excavated in front of the temple of Apollo; see A. Leone, “Un’adultera meretrix a Bulla Regia: Alcuni aspetti della città tardoantica,” *Africa Romana* 11 (1994): 1371–81 and Leone, *Changing Townscapes*, 84.

however, is recorded until the beginning of the eighth century, providing evidence for the continuity of the Christian presence after the Arab conquest.¹³³ This trend is comparable to the case of Uchi Maius.¹³⁴ In fact both centers continued to be occupied, with fortified structures being built within the former Roman city.

Conclusions

The evidence is patchy, and the lack of uniform data prevents the discussion of issues at the same level for all periods. Nevertheless a reinterpretation of the evidence allows significant points to be raised:

1. Data collected attest to a progressive increase in the number of bishops from 256, the time of Cyprian, up to 411, contemporary with the Donatist schism. This phenomenon was probably due to the need for more bishops in the territory in order to keep the Catholic community under control, as suggested by the case of Antoninus of Fussala.

There is no doubt that the fifth century is the period with the largest number of Catholic bishops recorded, followed by a reduction in number in the Byzantine period. After the Vandal phase an attempt was made by the Catholics to regain power, and Arians were obliged to return objects and property to the Catholic church, as indicated by the publication of the *Codex Justinianum*, *Novella* 37.5–8 on 1 August 535. After that date, this investigation suggests that there was a concerted effort to reorganize the ecclesiastical administration of the region. Cities that had lost their apparent monumentality nevertheless kept their bishops. The sixth and seventh centuries witnessed the appearance of a number of new seats, although these probably developed in connection with the disappearance of others (including rural ones), as in the case of Suas.¹³⁵ This point is inextricably linked to the follow-

ing one, regarding the continuity between the civic organization of the territory and the organization of the Catholic Church.

2. The presence of exclusively urban seats in the Byzantine period may also be related to the fact that North Africa became aware of the practice of having urban seats (common in the east) in the sixth century, with the *Breviatio Canonum* composed by Ferrandus of Carthage. It can be argued that this rule, commonly applied in the east, and probably dating back to 451, favored the correlation of civic and ecclesiastical territorial borders and became known in North Africa only in a later phase, during the Byzantine period, when a reorganization of sees and the inclusion of some new urban areas, such as the case of Suas, occurred.¹³⁶

3. Lancel's work suggested that the civic and administrative importance of an urban settlement did not play a substantial role in the allocation of a bishopric in the third and fourth centuries. In the Byzantine period, however, although the monumentality and wealth of a settlement do not seem to have determined the presence of a bishopric, the issue is somewhat complex. Uchi Maius and Bulla Regia, both in Africa Proconsularis, are significant in this respect. These settlements appear to undergo early monumental decay around the forum (recorded between the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century), and generally the Byzantine cities were reduced to small concentrations of houses near the forts and the church within the space of the former urban area.¹³⁷ These two settlements were probably not particularly rich at that time, and neither possessed a large territory (being in an area widely urbanized during the Roman period); therefore it was probably their geographical location and the size of the Christian community that played an important role

133 Islamic graves were also found in the church: N. Duval, "Les Dossiers du groupe episcopal de Bulla Regia," *Bulletin de la Societe Nationale des Antiquaires de France* (1969): 207–35. On the end of Christianity in Africa see most recently M. A. Handley, "Disputing the End of African Christianity," in *Vandals, Romans and Berbers*, ed. A. H. Merrills (Aldershot, 2004), 291–310.

134 On Uchi Maius and the transformation of the urban landscape, see Leone, *Changing Townscapes*, 135–47.

135 In the period of Gregory the Great there was considerable opposition by Catholic bishops in North Africa to the still-existing

Donatist fringe, especially in Numidia. On this minor Donatist presence, see Markus, "Country Bishops" (n. 1 above).

136 *Concilia Africae* (n. 40 above), "Ferrandi Ecclesiae Carthaginiensis diaconi breviario Canonum" (526–546). It is in Canon 17.16 of the Council of Chalcedon (451) that the rule of having *civitates* as sees was established. This was also made with the aim of overlapping the territory of ecclesiastical and civic provinces and stopping religious territorial disputes: see E. Schwarz, J. Straub, R. Schiefer, R. Riedinger, eds., *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum, Series Secunda*, vol. 3, pt. 1 (Berlin, 2008), 109, 548.

137 See on this Leone, *Changing Townscapes*, 167–222.

in determining the presence of a bishop. The decrease of rural bishoprics is apparent in the case study area, suggesting that urban settlements became the focus of bishops in the territory. In this respect the point made by Yvette Duval, that relics in the Byzantine period were deposited principally by urban bishops, finds justification, since there were probably very few rural bishops.

Further, the case of Telergma offers an interesting perspective: if this was not the seat of a bishopric, then the inscriptions attest to the presence of four different bishops from other areas. This opens up a wider discussion on the value and significance of bishops in rural areas, as well as on the issue of bishops involved in religious activities in territories not directly under their control, a practice that is not otherwise attested. This case may also be explained by the fact that the four saints mentioned in the inscriptions were not African, but Eastern, while the majority of the saints venerated in North Africa were African martyrs. The Henchir Hakrib inscription, mentioned above, likewise refers to Byzantine saints, along with African ones. Similarly the inscription referring to the deposition at Henchir Tarlist, dated to the seventh century, although it does not mention a bishop, refers to both African and Byzantine martyrs.¹³⁸ These saints may have been chosen because martyr cults to them already existed in the bishops' seats, but the late date of these depositions, all referring to Eastern saints (Telergma exclusively so) may have some connection with the weakening of Byzantine power in North Africa and the need of the Byzantine church to establish its presence. This may also explain the presence of multiple names in the dedication at Telergma, which links the bishop with the governor, as confirmed by Canon 18 of the *Concilium Quinisextum* in 692, where (at a very late date) an attempt was made to ensure that clergy did not abandon the less secure rural areas.¹³⁹ The church was thus struggling to maintain its presence and control in

the territory, as was everyone else at that time. In North Africa the problem began earlier, with the emergence of local tribes who were threatening the territory, in some regions, such as Tripolitana, already from the end of the third century.¹⁴⁰ The activity of bishops in the territory, such as the setting up of official ceremonies, may have resulted from a need to re-enforce the presence of the church and to give support to the local rural clergy in their struggle to control and exploit the territory. That struggle can be seen in the increased appearance of olive presses and elements for goods processing in connection with churches in both urban and rural areas.¹⁴¹ The phenomenon began in the Vandal period, especially in Proconsularis (as in the cases of El Gousset, Uchi Maius, and Bulla Regia) where the Vandal presence appears to have had a stronger impact. In other regions similar evidence becomes apparent at the end of the sixth century and was probably linked to the creation of the exarchate by Maurice.¹⁴² The participation of churches in production may also suggest, alongside the more active involvement of members of the clergy in economic matters, that the connection between urban and rural areas developed in a different manner in the later periods, when there is more interaction between the two; this transformation may have been determined by the progressive emergence of local tribes who made the territory particularly insecure. In fact some of the activities that were traditionally located outside the city or in the suburbs moved into urban zones and, in some cases, were directly connected with the church.¹⁴³ This

J. F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: The Transformation of a Culture* (Cambridge, 1990), 290.

140 For a general introduction on the tribal background in North Africa, see D. J. Mattingly, *Tripolitania* (London, 1995), 17–49. For an analysis of the evidence of local tribes in late antiquity in North Africa see Y. Modéran, *Les Maures et l'Afrique romaine (IV^e–VII^e siècle)*, Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome 314 (Rome, 2003), esp. 63–119.

141 A. Leone, "Topographies of Production in North African Cities during the Vandal and Byzantine Periods," in *Theory and Practice in Late Antique Archaeology*, ed. L. Lavan and W. Bowden (Leiden, 2003), 255–87 and Leone, *Changing Townscapes*, esp. 236–37, e.g., the cases of Sbeitla and Abthugnos.

142 For some general considerations on this see Leone, *Changing Townscapes*, 237–38 and 286–87.

143 In the case of urban areas this is recorded for instance at Sufetula (Sbeitla, Basilica V) and at Maktar (Basilica Iuvenum): Leone, *Changing Townscapes*, 228. In urban areas a case could be the church at Ksar el Guellal, in connection with a vast area for pottery

138 See on this Duval, *Loca Sanctorum*, 282–83. For a consideration of the late date of these inscriptions, see R. Devreesse, "L'Église d'Afrique durant l'occupation Byzantine," *MEFR* 57 (1940): 143–66 and more recently recalling the same points W. H. C. Frend, "From Donatist Opposition to Byzantine Loyalty: The Cult of Martyrs in North Africa 350–650," in Merrills, *Vandals, Romans and Berbers*, 259–69.

139 H. Ohne, ed., *Concilium Quinisextum: Das Konzil Quinisextum*, Fontes Christiani 82 (Turnhout, 2006), 208–9; for an analysis on the 7th-century crisis see 16–22. For some analysis see also

signified a progressively active relationship between the urban center and its suburban and rural surroundings, which necessitated the more direct control of bishops over their territories. They would have used various means to exert this control, such as a more immediate involvement in the deposition of relics.

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production; similar evidence has been recorded at Henchir Herrich, where the church is also connected with metalworking: Bejaoui, *L'architecture et le décor*, 205 and 209.

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